

FORT DUBOIS
81 Huguenot Street
New Paltz
Ulster County
New York

HABS No. NY-6132

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE DUBOIS FORT

HABS No. NY-6132

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Location: 81 Huguenot Street, New Paltz
Ulster County, New York
Latitude: 41°45' N Longitude: 74°05' W

Present Owner: The DuBois Family Association of the
Huguenot Historical Society

Present Occupant: Miss Alice Crans

Present Use: Restaurant and museum

Statement of Significance: Built about 1705 to satisfy terms of the
New Paltz patent that a fort be provided for
protection, this stone dwelling was a village
social and political meeting place through
the 18th century. The house was owned until
1968 by descendants of pioneer leader Louis
DuBois, and their alterations over those years
provide a record of six generations of American
life.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

I. Original and Subsequent Owners

The following is a chain of title to the land on which the
DuBois Fort stands:

- "The Ninth lot of the first teer (sic) of the Southern
Division" was drawn by Simon DuBois for the pattentees
share of Isaac DuBois, deceased, April 8, 1761. (Book of
the Duzine, p. 30, Huguenot Historical Society)
Occupation of the land by Isaac DuBois and his descendants
had begun as early as 1677.
- 1690 Upon the death of Isaac DuBois, land passed to his
widow, Maria Hasbrouck DuBois. (Old New Paltz Papers,
Huguenot Historical Society)
- 1718 Maria DuBois deeded to Daniel DuBois, her son, "the real
estate of lands and buildings situate...in the township
of New Paltz" in a document dated February 14, 1718/9.
(Old New Paltz Papers, Huguenot Historical Society)

- 1752 Upon the death of Daniel DuBois, land and homestead passed to son Simon DuBois under provisions of will dated August 16, 1729. (Old Estates Cabinet, Ulster County Surrogate's Office)
- 1799 Upon the death of Simon DuBois, "all messages and homestead lots, farm tenements (etc.)" passed to son Daniel DuBois, Jr. under provisions of will dated April 16, 1787 and probated May 22, 1799. (Ulster Co. Surrogate's Office)
- 1817 Upon death of Daniel DuBois, Jr., the will dated May 5, 1810 and recorded November 17, 1825 stated "it is my will that my Loving wife Catherine DuBois be and remain master of the Old Homestead, together with the lands." Upon her death or remarriage, estate was to pass to nephew Daniel I. DuBois. (Box 9, Ulster Co. Surrogate's Office) No death date has been found for Catherine DuBois, but Daniel I. DuBois seems to have taken possession between 1820 and 1825.
- 1852 Upon death of Daniel I. DuBois, land and homestead passed to widow Magdalene DuBois under provisions of will probated April 6, 1852. (Ulster Co. Surrogate's Office, Book N, p. 294)
- In a partition of land dated November 15, 1852 between John W. DuBois, Daniel DuBois and Mary DuBois, Mary was given "the Homestead House and lot." (Dingman Papers, Huguenot Historical Society, Memorial House Vault)
- 1855 Under provisions of will of Daniel DuBois, dated April 27, 1855, all real and personal estate was left to his mother Magdalene DuBois, and to Mary DuBois upon Magdalene's death or remarriage. (DuBois Family Collection, Huguenot Historical Society)
- 1858 Upon death of Magdalene DuBois, her interest in the estate passed to daughter Mary DuBois under provisions of will dated September 15, 1857 and probated January 25, 1858. (Ulster Co. Surrogate's Office, Book N, p. 529)
- 1902 Mary DuBois Berry died intestate January 14, 1902. By court order, the estate was divided between daughters Louise DuBois Berry and Marie Antoinette Berry. (Ulster County Surrogate's Office, Box 457)
- 1941 Quit claim from Marie Berry Lewis to Louise Berry Dingman for her interest in "the homestead house and lot known as the 'Old Fort.'" (Dingman Papers, Huguenot Historical Society, Memorial House Vault)

- 1966 Upon death of Louise Berry Dingman, July 16, 1966, land and house passed to husband Dr. John C. Dingman. (Records filed in Rockland County, New York)
- 1968 Deed dated April 10, 1968 transferred ownership from Dr. John C. Dingman to the DuBois Family Association of the Huguenot Historical Society.

II. Social and Architectural History

In over 250 years of use, the DuBois Fort has undergone many changes. The exact dates and extent of the alterations have not been documented, nor has an expert, thorough examination of the building fabric been made. By overlaying the family history with the large-scale observations made during the HABS recording activity, however, several periods of construction activity become apparent.

1705 The original New Paltz land grant, dated 1677, was made on the condition that "they (the twelve Huguenot families) build a redoubt there first for a place of retreat and safeguard upon occasion."¹ There was never a real need for protection but, according to local historians, the colonial authorities insisted that the provisions be carried² out. Therefore, around 1705, Daniel DuBois, grandson of pioneer leader Louis DuBois, built a stone house which could also serve as a fort. The date of construction has not been verified, but is based primarily on the existance of iron tie rods in the shape of "1 7 0 5" on the eastern end. Since

these rods tie into later construction, this evidence must be held in question, though most of the other stone houses in the vicinity were built between 1692 and 1720.

The appearance of this original structure is uncertain. LeFevre, in the History of New Paltz, relates that "The old homestead in (Daniel's) day is described as an old-fashioned one-story house with a basement, the entrance to which was directly off the street." ³ The 1798 Tax Assessment for New Paltz recorded a house belonging to Daniel DuBois, Jr., grandson of the original builder, "in Paltz town or village joining on Roelf and John Eltinge" with the following ⁴ characteristics:

Stories	Dimensions		Windows		Material	Land	Value
	length	breadth	length	breadth nr.			
1	40'	22'	4-2/3'	x 3-1/6'	3	stone	1 acre \$375
A	20'	20'	2-1/3'	x 2-1/4'	1		

This structure seems to correspond with the stone portion of the house. The foundation and lower walls of the east end are probably early 18th century construction; ⁵ traces of a one-story gable can be discerned in the stonework of the east end; and stone foundations for a large central fireplace remain in the basement. The gunports of the north and east walls are also assumed to date from the original building.

1790-1810 During the 18th century, the Fort served as a community center as well as a home. According to legend, "It was here that the cousins who rode in from the surrounding country on winter Sundays were wont to repair before entering the cold, unheated church."⁶ Daniel, his son Simon, and grandson Daniel were all holders of important offices in the town. Meetings of the Justice of the Peace were held there between 1792 and 1814.⁷ The first Ulster County Committee of Safety convened there on April 7, 1775.⁸ In the Book of the Duzine, New Paltz's unique governing body, there are several references to hearings on the final partition of lands held in 1796-98 "at the house of Daniel DuBois, Innkeeper."⁹

Daniel DuBois, Jr. seems to have taken possession of the house before his father's death in 1799. The 1790 census records list Daniel, not Simon, as a head of household.¹⁰ Indentures dated 1785 and 1789 convey Simon's 300-acre farm and later "all my neat cattle, sheep, hogs and farming utensils" to Daniel and his brothers.¹¹ In 1797, Daniel married Catherine Bessemer¹² and in the spring of 1800, they went on a shopping trip to New York City, purchasing household utensils, fabric and carpeting.¹³

Whether to facilitate the homestead's use as an inn or to fulfill the wishes of his new wife, Daniel DuBois, Jr. seems to have made additions to the building. The placement of first floor sills and joists are such that the western

wing was most likely built at a different time from the main section. The large fireplace, dutch oven and foundation walls of this wing are c. 1780-1810.¹⁴ There is a materials list among the "DuBois Fort Collection" which calls for:

4 pound of floor nails
4 pound of shingel (sic) nails
2 pair of catchels for doors
1 pair of small catchels
half pound of penny nails
61 squares of glass
6 pound of putty
2 quarts of oyl (sic)
2 pound of white lead
1 pint of lam (sic) black
3 thum (sic) latches. 15

It is unsigned and undated, but is similar in ink, paper quality and handwriting to other papers by Daniel DuBois at this time, and contains roughly the same kind and number of materials which would be needed to build the new wing.

1820-1835 The date on which Daniel I. DuBois took possession of the Fort is uncertain. In 1820, however, he married Magdalene Hasbrouck, and one can speculate that he took his bride to the old homestead. The next fifteen years seem to have witnessed a great deal of building activity and constitute the period in which the Fort's present appearance evolved.

Daniel DuBois was involved in many real estate transactions during these years, made several large loans and received property when the debtors went bankrupt.¹⁶ One can theorize that the profits from these ventures were put into embellishments for his home. He also served as

Town Clerk from 1830-39 and 1846-51,¹⁷ and may have felt the need for a more fashionable home in keeping with his status.

The panelled walls surrounding the exterior of the main entrance date from about 1820.¹⁸ It is logical that the construction of the central hall, which probably created the new entrance, and the second story would have been contemporary. A change from the older, random stonework with small stones in the joints to a more carefully dressed masonry around the first floor door on the north side and above the first story walls on both the north and east sides shows that old stonework was ripped out and newer work added. LeFevre said that "Daniel rebuilt the old stone house, but the walls of the lower portion of the house have been left unchanged."¹⁹

The roof framing, employing previously-used rafters, and the center hall floor framing were done at the same time. Hollow spots in the eastern walls point to places where older windows were covered over, while segments of brick on surrounds indicate where others may have been enlarged. The large original hearth and chimney must have been removed from the central portion, and smaller foundations and chimneys inserted to serve Franklin stoves at each end of the main house.²⁰

The unusual two-story porch along the south side dates from about 1835. In that year, Daniel DuBois sold a tavern in the village acquired from a debtor in 1833.

In 1835, his personal property tax value jumped from zero to \$3,000. By 1838, however, it had dropped back down to \$1,000²¹ and the proceeds may have been spent on the construction of the porch.

1850-1860 The interior woodwork of the central hall²² dates from the 1850's. After Daniel DuBois's death in 1852, an inventory was made of the estate and an auction sale of farm implements and livestock held which netted \$334.35.²³ Any subsequent home improvements probably took place before Magdalene DuBois's death in 1858, since Mary, who inherited the estate, was only 20 years old at that time.

1888-1890 From 1867 until 1888, Mary DuBois leased²⁴ her family home and travelled through the West. She married Ronello Berry of Boise, Idaho in 1875 and had three children there, the youngest of whom died in infancy. In 1888, Mary Berry returned to New Paltz with her two daughters. The house had apparently suffered during her absence, for she purchased large quantities of household equipment in the spring of 1888 and had many repairs made to the building.²⁵ The most clearly documented of these improvements is a new tin roof, installed in²⁶ December of 1888.

1937-Present Mary DuBois Berry's two daughters became owners of the Fort upon her death in 1902. They married in 1905 and 1908, however, and each moved to her husband's home. The house and outbuildings were leased to other tenants.

In 1937, alterations were made so that the house could be used as a restaurant. New plumbing, wiring and a kitchen wing to the west were added. The two chimneys of the main house were rebuilt, the eastern from the roof up and the western from the base of the attic. Most of the old windowpanes were replaced, and glass inserted in the re-opened gunports. The old privy was torn down. In 1962, the porch was extensively repaired and in 1975, the tin roof was replaced with cedar shingles.

III. Sources

1. LeFevre, Ralph The History of New Paltz and Its Old Families Albany: Brandow Printing Co. (1909) p. 18. LeFevre is considered a questionable source by most local historians, but I include his accounts of legends where they seem to fit the building's history.
2. Heidgerd, William The American Descendents of Chretien DuBois New Paltz: Huguenot Historical Society (1968) preface
3. LeFevre op. cit. p. 300
4. 1798 New Paltz Tax Assessment, Old New Paltz Papers Collection, Huguenot Historical Society (HHS), French Church Vault (FCV)
5. Estimates of the age of structural details were offered by Jack Waite, restoration architect, during a field survey of the DuBois Fort July 12, 1977.
6. DuBois, Cornelia E. The Story of the Paltz privately printed (1936) p. 22
7. Le Fevre op. cit. appendix p. 98
8. New Paltz Independent February 25, 1941
9. Book of the Duzine, Old New Paltz Papers Collection
10. Heidgerd, William Ulster County Biographical Dictionary unpublished ms. at the Elting Memorial Library, New Paltz.
11. DuBois Fort Collection, HHS, FCV
12. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical references to members of the DuBois family are from Heidgerd, The American Descendents of Chretien DuBois.
13. DuBois Fort Collection
14. Waite. Heidgerd also feels that "The frame wing of the western end was added...in the early 19th century."

15. DuBois Fort Collection
16. Jesse E. DuBois Collection, HHS, FCV
17. Old New Paltz Papers Collection
18. Waite
19. LeFevre op. cit. p. 301
20. Waite
21. New Paltz Tax Records, HHS, Memorial House Vault (MHV)
22. Waite
23. Jesse E. DuBois Collection. The second half of the account book is in the Jesse DuBois Collection of the Elting Memorial Library.
24. Lease dated April 1, 1867 between Mary DuBois and Luther DuBois, continued through 1874, when transferred to Jesse Elting. DuBois Family Collection, HHS.
25. DuBois Family Collection
26. Bill from John Elting, tinsmith, dated December, 1888, DuBois Family Collection.
27. Miscellaneous bills, work lists and contracts, Dingman Collection, HHS, MHV

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For: Huguenot Historical Society
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